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Perseverance

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Jordan Anderson

Perseverance

I realize that growing up I lived a really easy life. My parents were both successful and always provided for me. We never struggled financially, and people credited me solely on the success of my parents. I never had to work hard in anything besides homework, and as a result I became lazy, nonchalant, and carefree. High school was a wakeup call. Although I could get away with being lazy my first few years, by junior and senior year, playing that card no longer worked. I began missing opportunities and not being allowed to take part in certain exclusive school and extracurricular events. The beginning of senior year was truly a wakeup call, and being placed as a regular band member, rather than an officer like every other senior in the band ignited a desire within me that still burns today to show that I am ambitious and just as capable as anyone else.

As I turned the brass knob of the backyard door and stepped onto the red carpet of the main room of the house, I reached into my blue shorts pocket, checking my cell phone for text messages. I dropped the phone onto the cold, wooden floor in shock at the message. I sprinted upstairs to my dresser. Yanking open the drawers, I slipped on a blue Nike shirt, tan cargo shorts, and blue Adidas tennis shoes, picked up the phone off the floor, and charged out of the house. I jogged the five blocks from home to school and thought of what the message had said: “Jordan, hurry up and get to school before you miss your audition. You’re next.” I received that message at 9:15 in the morning; the time was now 12:01 and there was a second message. It read, “Don’t bother coming. Auditions are over.”

I ran, my arms pumping, and I appreciated that I lived close enough to school that I would not have to involve my parents in this mess. I swung around the corner and passed the

school's snowball stand. I prayed for at least one person to still be on campus. Then I noticed one of the younger kids in my section. A tenor drummer named Read.

"Read! Are you finished with your auditions?" I shouted, gasping for breath.

"I finished them a while ago. Now I'm just waiting for my parents to come pick me up."

"Is anyone still upstairs?"

"Mr. Cee and Mr. Bashel should still be up there."

"Oh, good. Well, I'll check and try to explain why I was late."

"Auditions are already over, so I don't know what good that will do you."

"I know, but I should still try something."

I walked across the empty parking lot and pushed the bar-handle door open and forced myself into the stairwell. My heart slammed to the ground and bounced back up again each step I took. As I turned the knob to the band-room door, a flash revealed the presence of my peers, and I relaxed. The band's officers and section leaders, elected the year before, were there and had authority over all non-officers. Section leaders only had authority over their sections, chosen by Mr. Cee, the band director. Mr. Cee had not mentioned my name in the selection of officers, but he also had not chosen a percussion tenor section captain yet. I choked during my previous audition, a practice audition before the start of summer to see how much work I needed before the actual auditions. Mr. Bashel had lowered his head and said he knew I could do better. This time around, if I was not too late, I would do better.

"I'm sorry, Jordan, but the auditions are over," Mr. Bashel said.

Although I had already predicted what he would say, a shock filled my entire body. I had written on my calendar and circled the date of the auditions. Twice. I copied the time straight

from the school website. So I refused to leave Mr. Bashel's presence with those words he left me with.

"Mr. Bashel, were auditions really today? The date on Schoology.com said that they were tomorrow."

"Oh, well, we had changed the date at the last summer practice. The one that you had missed." Mr. Bashel turned to the officers.

"Why didn't anyone tell Jordan about the new audition date?" The officers all looked at each other, until one spoke up.

"I figured Jordan already knew. We should have told him sooner. I tried texting and calling him today, but he didn't answer."

Then all eyes went back on me. Mr. Bashel continued.

"I'm sorry Jordan. We should have contacted you sooner. Don't worry about the auditions. You don't need to take them."

I should have felt relieved, but instead I felt I hadn't proven my confidence, or that I'd improved. For that reason, on the first day of band camp, as Mr. Cee announced the new section leaders, based on leadership and audition scores, he did not utter my name. As he pronounced the last name, I lowered my eyebrows and glared in resentment. Then Mr. Cee began his speech. It was difficult to focus. I sulked. I felt a spark of hope as I caught his last words: "Anyone, officer or section leader can be promoted or demoted at any given time."

Although I went home with a crushed spirit, I would not let that failure get to me. As I stared at new music from the first day of band camp, a fire lit within my spirit. I would show them why I should be a section leader.

The sun beat down on band camp for all seven days, each filled with the same routine, and band camp seemed more like a military boot camp. Mornings were for conditioning: running laps, stretching, and strengthening our muscles with pushups. Some of the younger kids threw up and passed out under the the sun, fluids drained from their bodies. Even one of the new section leaders tossed his half-digested breakfast onto the baking concrete. Fortunately, I was one of the few already conditioned. Then the officers took charge, leading us in marching procedures, and practicing basic movements. As the officers led, I wondered if they, once my friends, were now arrogant dictators, or if my jealousy gave me that illusion. We went back inside for a water break and returned to the brutal conditions for section practice.

Officer Hammad managed the tenors, and gave Tren, one of the younger students, the authority of counting off, and deciding what we play during warm-ups. At this, my blood boiled with jealousy.

“Why would you have Tren lead us instead of me? I’ve been in the section the longest!”

“Well, Tren got the highest score in auditions, and seems capable.”

“That’s not fair! You and I both know I couldn’t even go to auditions!”

With that, everyone shouted, “We know.”

Then officer Hammad continued. “You did audition before the summer, but you didn’t do too well.”

I quit arguing and blew off my steam with a joke.

Each night as I walked home, I practiced the new material. Each morning, I saw Hammad in the band room, earlier than the others, practicing the same material, sometimes playing the songs better than I. My goal was to surpass Hammad to become section leader. The tenors were

one of the few sections in which everyone was equal, rather than having guys who didn't care, or practice, or were at a much lower or higher level. We all wanted to contribute to the band.

As the week went by, the tenors became a strong unit. Mr. Bashel told Mr. Cee how well the tenors were doing, and Mr. Cee acknowledged us with a smirk. I stayed at school after camp hours to practice in the band room. Hammad noticed my practicing and asked if he could join and the tenors hold a private sectional. I agreed and asked Mr. Bashel.

“Can the tenors have a private sectional?” His face lit up with a pleased expression.

“Sure.”

On the last day of camp, I overheard a conversation between Mr. Bashel and Mr. Cee.

“What do you think of Jordan? I mean, I’ve seen him coming in everyday and he’s really been practicing.”

“Well, Mr. Bashel, I needed to know if I could trust Jordan first. He was supposed to be the tenor section leader, but I didn’t know if he would be worthy with an audition like the one he had. I didn’t know if he could handle a section if he couldn’t even handle himself. He never used to take band seriously.”

“I know. But he’s a good musician and he has really improved since then. He practices more now and seems to really want to be section leader.”

“You’re right about those things, Mr. Bashel. I think it is time we promote Jordan to section leader to see what he is capable of. We don’t want to do to him what we did to Michael last year.”

Mr. Cee walked towards me.

“Jordan, I see that you have really stepped up in the past few weeks. I’ve been considering promoting you to section leader. I know that you can handle it, and want to continue to see you improve. I will announce it to the band sometime next week.

With the start of school came the announcement. All eyes turned on me as Mr. Cee spoke. I gave smirk and looked around at everyone, not saying anything. It was done. I may not have been an officer, but section leader was the next best thing.

The weeks that followed slowed down. I did not practice as aggressively, but I still did more than I had before. Mr. Cee decided to try something new with the drum section: placements within the section. Auditions determined the placement of each person. I tensed up in the audition and got third, with Hammad on top and Dan in second. Out of four tenors, I placed third. Mr. Bashel came and explained that the seats weren’t permanent. That if anyone showed why they should be in a higher placement, they can be moved. I headed toward the door after a long day. The fire was lit again. I would prove that I was not third place material, but first.